

Karanams of the Ancient Tamils

K. V. Ramakrishna Rao, B.Sc., M.A., A. M. I. E., C. Eng (I), B.L.,

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1. **Introduction:** Man of any society, in any civilization at time and place is totally affected, roused and even exited by the events taking place from birth to death. As such happenings are connected with social, economic and political processes, with the advancement of civilization, some of them are recognized as institutions. The connected rites, rituals and ceremonies are developed and codified to suit the changes and requirements of society. A critical study of such rites, rituals and ceremonies reveal many interesting details in historical perspective.

1.2. An attempt is made in paper to examine various rites, rituals and ceremonies of the ancient Tamils as depicted in Ettuttogai and Pattuppattu. Different names and expressions used like Tanniradal, Madalerudal, Varaipaydal, Silambu kazhi, Kadi, Varai, Manral, Nan manam, Vadhuvai, Neyyani mayakkam, Udanurai vazhkkai, Vizhavu, Kaimmai, Nadukal etc., are analyzed as to whether they represented various functions conducted and ceremonies performed. For convenience, the word “Karanam” is used here with an embracing sense to cover all aspects of such practices.

1.3. The word Karanam is not found in the Ettuttogai and Pattuppattu literature, but in Tolkappiyam, where it refers to the sacrament or ceremony of marriage introduced¹. It has profound meaning in Tamil expounding various aspects of mind-body relationship². Karanams are the psychosomatic actions of the ancient Tamils performed from birth to death connecting not only the processes of mind and body, but also with nature. They educate, cultivate, train, refine, perfect and purify mind through the external and physical rituals,. The external symbols used and actions performed have a greater impact on mind and psychological processes. The birth to death Karanams are generally divided into the following broad categories:

1. Natal – Karanams pertaining to impregnation, conception and birth.
2. Childhood – pertaining to children’s growth.
3. Education – pertaining to education and learning processes.
4. Marital – pertaining to Kalavu and Karpu.
5. Funeral – pertaining to death and thereafter.

Accordingly, the practices of the ancient Tamils are taken up for study.

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2. **Impregnation**: Kalavi, Kudal, Punarchi and Meyyaru punarchi are the expressions used to denote Impregnation. As far as the ancient Tamils are concerned, there were two forms of union of man and woman: Kalavu – union in secrecy and Karpu – union in open. But, such union is effected according to pre-determined and prescribed norms. Paripadal outlines³ that of all desires, the desire that springs from love is the best; of sexual pleasure, the accepted ones who agree to have such one is the best; of all feigns the blessed one is the result of Karpu. This proves that impregnation results with purpose. After impregnation, the fertilized egg grows to attain full form of child within ten months. With the metabolic growth, the child grows with the knowledge of present and future⁴. From the arrangement of poems according to tinai, uripporul and season, the prescribed day, time and other details of impregnation are implied. But, in Tolkappiyam, we find some direct references about the sacrament performed to this effect. The Karpial sutra 185 mentions that the poets say husband should not be away from his wife during the twelve days after the menstrual period, even if he were in the midst of pratathaiyar (prostitutes). Nachiniyarkuniyar comments that the twelve days might be six days before and six days after the period of menstruation. Some scholars say husband can have union with wife after the period of menstruation, that is from fourth day onwards for twelve days. Again in sutra 185 of Kalaviyal, it is mentioned that the union in Kalaviyal occurs all the days except the three days (of menstruation). Begetting children was considered as the fruit of such solemnized union. Therefore, it is evident that ancient Tamils knew the science of eugenics to have good children.

3. **Procreation of Vigorous Child**: The ancient Tamils longed for begetting both male and female children without any discrimination. Ingurunuru depicts as to how a Kuravan prays to God to bless him with a female child⁵. The first male child is mentioned as “Kadunchuzh ciruvan” and first female child “Kadunchuzh magal”⁶. The right of “mother of a son” is stressed, implying that the son gets all the rights of family, property, because he is the son of the mother⁷. A son is also known as “Tantaipeyran” i.e, having the name of father⁸. The names of sons start with the names of fathers. Many examples can be cited from the names of the Sangam poets, heroes and kings. Paditruppattu mentions how mothers are praised with esteem for begetting worthy sons. It also describes about a yagna performed by Peruncheral Irumporai along with his wife⁹. Agananuru emphasizes that having a son makes one benefited for both immai (this present life) and marumai (the next life)¹⁰. Purananuru mentions about the practice of seeing the first born child-son, after few days with marital costume¹¹.

4. **Taking care of Pregnant Women**: Many poems depict how the husbands are always going after parathaiyar even leaving pregnant wives at home to suffer. But, they are strongly condemned by companions, foster-mothers and others and advised them to be with their wives, keeping them mentally satisfied and happy. Puram describes how a husband is rushing to his house knowing about the expectancy of his wife to help her¹². The pregnant state of women is vividly portrayed in several poems: sufferings from masakkai (longings, aversions etc of a pregnant woman mainly due to pollution)¹³; her desire to eat earth, because of

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masakkai¹⁴; manner of walking¹⁵; going to temple to worship God¹⁶; comparing her body to a cow, because of the tender and delicate nature¹⁷; All these show that they should be taken care of carefully providing them with all their requirements. Then, only she would be happy and mentally prepared to deliver a good baby. As the growth of child starts from conception, they should be treated with kindness, then only, the born child would be normal and good without any defects. In fact, Puram accounts to avoid eight types of natal defects¹⁸:

1. Blindness (eye defects)
2. Irregular physical growth / physical deformation.
3. Hump-back.
4. Dwarf ness.
5. Dumbness.
6. Deafness.
7. Animal-form birth (physical deformation leading to such forms).
8. Dunce / mental retard ness.

The learned have categorically told that life is useless with these defects. It is also emphasized that is the duty of a mother to beget a good son and bring him with care¹⁹. All these prove the importance of taking care of pregnant women.

4.1. An important point to be noted in the ancient Tamil literature is the significance of women's hair. Before marriage, the hair can be touched only by her mother and after marriage by her husband and not by any other²⁰. The parting off of wife's hair during the ceremony of Simantam can be perhaps traced back to this practice. This is done only to make pregnant wife fully prepared to deliver baby and keep her mind calm and happy.

5. **Neyyani Mayakkam**: As has already been mentioned the presence of husband is very much required before and after the delivery of child. The pregnant woman prays to God for having a good and normal delivery without any problem²¹. Just after delivery, her body becomes warm and tender²². A ceremony "Neyyani mayakkam" is performed for purification purpose. The mother who just delivered a baby is considered as impure. After some specified time, she is given a bath to purify her body and polluted state (Pulavu punirvu – the state of impurity)²³. The bath also helps her to secret milk²⁴, thus attaining lactating stage. The bath is given with the application of ghee on her body. The interior of the house, where she has delivered the child, is applied with the paste of ghee and white mustard seeds for the benefit of the mother and child²⁵. In fact, the mother rest after the bath along with the child²⁶. There is also a practice that such women do not wear bangles²⁷.

6. **Of Children**: There is no specific mention about the naming ceremony of child, except that the child, if it is a male will be having the name of his father (Tanthai peyaran) ²⁸. The practice of bringing child outside the house to a place of fresh air is implied at many places. Moon is shown to the child²⁹. Breast feeding is emphasized and practiced³⁰. It is considered as duty to mothers and

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they are also proud to do so. Purananuru enumerates the rituals conducted for a child in order³¹ as follows:

1. Removal of silver anklet and tying of virakkazhal (ornament of valour). It reminds the Silambu kazhi nonbu (the ceremony of removal of anklet) performed in the case of women just before marriage.
2. Removal of hair (tonsure) and tying tender neem leave with Uzhinjai (cerua – a kind of cotton shrub) creeper.
3. Removal of small bangles and giving bow in hands.
4. Removal of Imbadaitali (on the fifth day of completion of childhood)
5. Dispensing with milk and started giving rice / cereal food.

Kalittogai³² gives the following details: decoration of child with jewels; dropping of saliva from the mouth; trying to walk with go-cart; breast feeding; babbles; comparing characteristic features of son with that of father; advising and disciplining by the mother. The references of Purananuru as mentioned above are abundantly found in other works³³. This clearly proves the fact that the ceremonies of tying anklets, wearing bangles and Imbadaitali were in vogue. Ear-boring ceremony must also have been present, as there are many references about children, ladies and even gents wearing “kuzhais” – ear-rings³⁴. Kings, chieftains and heroes wore kuzhais invariably, therefore, they must have been undergone the ear-boring ceremony. Considering the nature of practice mentioned, it is evident that the ceremonies enumerated were for the children below one year or so and that of Kalittogai for the children who were trying to learn walking or about to walk.

7. Of Education: Some modern scholars have opined that the study of the ancient Tamils society shows that education was not formalized or institutionalized, as they were only leading tribal state of life and hence the prevalence of established educational institutions cannot be thought of³⁵. This view could not be totally true considering the nature of Sangam literature. Such high quality and standardized literature could not have sprung from the tribes, nomadic bards and petty poets. Just because, there are few references about the formal or institutionalized educational system as perceived by the modern mind, we cannot categorically come to the conclusion that such system was absent during Sangam period. The very name “Sangam” or the existence of such institution proves the established system of education. Besides poetry, other arts and sciences were also definitely flourished during that period as evidenced by the factors of civilization, heritage and culture of the ancient Tamils.

7.1. Paditruppattu alludes that developing child inside embryo starts learning³⁶. After ten months, the child comes out with the knowledge of present and future and all other good qualities. According to Indian tradition, education starts from the embryonic state or from the fetus, the first sense organ to be developed is ear. That is why pregnant women are treated well and care is taken that they always listen to good news. It is interesting to note that the ancient Tamils knew the fact. Puram emphasizes that it is the duty of father to make his son wise and

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knowledgeable³⁷. it is better that one should learn and acquire knowledge by helping teachers during their critical days or giving money to them with respect and devotion³⁸. Acquiring knowledge by either serving or helping the teachers can be considered as Gurukula system of education and by paying institutionalized form of education. Though, for a mother all sons are equal, she may treat them discriminately, because of their wisdom and knowledge acquired through their education³⁹. the rulers govern getting advise from the learned irrespective of the fact as to whether such learned person is an elder or younger of a family. Similarly, if a person from lower strata of society learns and excels in studies, he will be respected by others of higher strata of society⁴⁰. Tolkappiyar specifically mentions that lovers or husband and wife can separate for the purpose of “Otal” i.e, education⁴¹.

8. Returning Home after Education: Marriage after education is implied in the poems dealing with Kalavu and Karpur. Companions and foster-mothers of lady-love and wife advise the sojourned lover or husband to join immediately. In the case of lovers, they hasten the process of marriage by meeting and advising the lover to initiate action for the purpose by revealing the fact to the parents. As the concept of Aram, Porul and Inbam is found in Purananuru itself and the references about the union of separated in the cases of earning wealth and war have been mentioned, it is evident that those who have separated for education also follow the order to fulfill their traditional and domestic obligations and duties.

9. Marriage: The rites, rituals and ceremonies connected with marriage are perhaps the most elaborate. Kadi, Varai, Manral, Vaduvai, Manral, Manam, Nan manam and Perumanam are the expressions used for marriage. There are two forms of marriage Kalavu and Karpur according to the traditional union of man and woman. Love is the basis for such process. No doubt, though it originates instinctively between man and woman, in some cases, even at first sight, it binds their hereditary and environmental factors. Love succeeds only after the satisfaction of such factors. Therefore the possibilities are love accepted by both or one sided. In the former case, it leads to marriage proposals and in the latter to undesirable consequences of resorting to violent methods by lovers of Madalerudhal, Varaipaydal etc.

According to Tamil tradition, the unmarried girls have the custom of praying God and taking bath in rivers during the month of Tai (January) for having a good husband⁴². Therefore, they will be expecting their would-be-husband with anxious. The girls, who have attained the age of marriage are kept at house with all comforts⁴³, but they have every right to select their own choice of their life partner.

According to another tradition⁴⁴, the father of girl has a violent bull and it will be let out during a festival or for challenge. Any boy, who catches the bull by its horns and brings under control, can ask the hand of the girl for marriage.

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Once the love is known, it becomes the talk of the town (alar). The companions and foster-mothers help the lovers to meet, discuss and understand each other for the fulfillment of love. They also advise the male counterparts, if they err in their behaviour, go to Parathaiyar or try to break the relationship. They make maximum efforts for the success of their love.

In the case of boys, they first enquire about the girl, her name, residence etc., and make arrangements for marriage proposals through their parents⁴⁵. the parents of boy go to the residence of girl and ask for marriage. They offer parisam i.e, bride-price⁴⁶. if the parents of the girl accept, they proceed further to finalise for formalities. If they do not accept, instances are there where the parents of boy threaten them with battle⁴⁷. there are occasions, where even kings, chieftains and others heads ask the hands of girls of ordinary social status, because of their beauty⁴⁸. The marriage by acceptance has the following features:

Checking the matching factors: As has been pointed out by Paripadal, only man and woman of acceptable status and willingness will be united by the Karanam. Tolkappiyar⁴⁹ specifies the following factors: Birth, family lineage, strength, age, beauty, love, patience, mercy, knowledge and wealth.

Fixing an auspicious day and time: The auspicious day is selected in such a way that the star Rohini is in conjunction with moon and the time is morning, without any combination of bad planets⁵⁰.

Parisam – Bride price: The age-old practice is to offer parisam i.e, bride-price before marriage. It may be an offer of money, towns or any other valuable thing⁵¹. Varai and Kodai are also used to denote this.

Pandal, decoration etc: Agananuru describes beautifully the decoration of marriage pandal and other details connected with a typical ancient Tamil marriage⁵².

Silmbu kazhi nonbu: it is performed at the residence of the bride a day before the marriage. The Silambu or anklet worn at the time of her puberty is removed now, to mark the occasion of the fulfillment of it. As it is a purely a function of bride, the mothers consider it as an honour to perform at their residences⁵³.

Marriage function: It is performed in a decorated pandal with all relatives and friends and others of the town blessing the couple⁵⁴. Elderly and auspicious ladies with children help to perform various rites and rituals. Finally, they bless the bride to live with her husband forever⁵⁵. The practice of tying Tali is also there⁵⁶. The grasping of the bride's hand by the groom is also mentioned⁵⁷.

Other forms of marriage: If the parents do not accept for marriage, the lovers run away from their town, get married and return^{57a}. If they are accepted by their parents, karanams are applicable to them with some exceptions⁵⁸. As the previous union (or marriage) has happened without proper karanams, a mother

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suggests that her daughter may have a symbolic bath at her residence, so that she can undergo other rituals⁵⁹. Marriage by force or kidnapping is also considered as virtue / right in some cases⁶⁰. In any case, some karanams are performed, if they are accepted by their parents for regularization.

10. **Married Life**: Udanuraivu, Udanurai vazhkkai and Ilvazhkkai are used for the married life with profound meaning implying the duties of husband and wife⁶¹. It is stressed that married life or living with wife during youth is important than earning wealth. Life can be enjoyed, when there is youth in the body and desire in the minds of husband and wife⁶², implying that they should fulfill the obligations of married life. Thus, successful marriages are considered as the hallmark of any civilization and hence importance given.

11. **Retiring from Family Life**: Retiring from life is not escaping from the duties and responsibilities, but setting an example for present generation through their illustrious acts and deeds. Then, they also need not have any worries about the past and can lead contented life. When Pisiranthaiyar was asked why his hair did not turn grey in spite of old-age, he replied that his wife had great virtues and her actions were also according to such virtues; his children were educated and they were full of wisdom and knowledge his servant did what he thought to do so; his rulers did only that were good to their citizens and not any other thing. Moreover, the city where he lived, there were many great men of good virtues with humility before elders, having conquered their five senses⁶³. Thus, the purpose of life is succinctly described. In fact, the concept of Aram (virtue), Porul (wealth) and Inbam (happiness) with addition of Veedu (Perfection of spirituality or total liberation) found in the Sangam works is the systematized stages of life to be followed.

12. **Leading Life of Spirituality**: After retiring from the family life, man slowly starts to think about uncertainty of the mundane life and prepare himself for certainty of other life. Universal outlook, equanimity of mind, modesty and other similar virtues change lifestyle and direct his mind towards spirituality. Purananuru explains such a state of a person. For him, all places are his native place and all are relatives; good or bad, nothing comes through others, but all are due to one's own action only. Death is also not new for anybody, because, it is known that even at the time of conception, (it is predetermined that) one is to born to die. Therefore, one need not be happy about life, when there is happiness or feel dejected, when there is trouble. The life is just like a bubble floating over a river, moving quickly during rain. Just like bubble, it may break at any time. Therefore, one need not praise the great or criticize the ordinary people with bias⁶⁴. In one house, drum is beaten to announce death, whereas in another house, drum is beaten to mark the occasion of marriage. There the ladies remove jewels with tearful eyes; here ladies are bedecked with jewels and flowers. The creator has made these provisions during his creation itself. This nature of the world is perhaps very cruel. But, understanding this, one should do good things leading to heaven⁶⁵. Even if one cannot do any good thing, let him not do any bad thing that is appreciated by everybody. That attitude itself leads him to right

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direction⁶⁶. If a man accomplishes the duties of earlier stages of life, he will attain equanimity of mind to view and consider all happiness without any discrimination. He will be in a position to endure, forebear and moderate anything that may or may not happen to him or others. In others, he may be in mental state to get him released quickly from this world.

13. **Last Rites:** The rites and rituals conducted to the dead are fundamentally based on the beliefs and philosophical aspects about birth, death, life after death, rebirth, next world, transmigration of soul and other ideas. The ceremony of the disposal of dead is the very old practice in the ancient Tamilzhagam closely connected with the ancestor worship. Puram⁶⁷ specifies three types of disposal:

- ⇒ Exposure or cast away (Iduthal),
- ⇒ Cremation (Sudhuthal) and
- ⇒ Complete inhumation (Paduthal).

It is quite natural that initially, the dead bodies are left as such to be decayed in due course or eaten away by vultures or animals⁶⁸. Then, the close relatives may not have liked the dead bodies to be disposed in such a way, therefore, they are covered with stones⁶⁹. Then, the practice of cremation is introduced with the introduction of fire and fire connected rituals⁷⁰. Where fire wood is scanty, the extension of exposure is converted into complete inhumation of the dead, including urn and stone burials. Urn burial is found in the literature with interesting details⁷¹ and so also stone burials supported by many archaeological evidences⁷².

13.2. **Nadukal:** The given details about Nadukal⁷³ (literally meaning ‘an erected stone’) show how the practice is evolved into a full-fledged ritual. Initially, the place where the person died is considered as important or sacred and nadukal is erected there⁷⁴. Then, a place is selected for erection⁷⁵ followed with other rites – covered with cloth; stone is placed on an elevated platform; washed with good waters; name and fame of the dead are inscribed; worshipped with the offer of flowers, food, incense; even animals are sacrificed; lamps are lit; thus the dead is elevated to the status of god and considered as God⁷⁶. The direction was chosen as ‘south’ perhaps coinciding with the direction in which the body fell or found. From this, the concept of fore-fathers living in the southern direction with the status of god might have been developed. In fact, Puram emphasizes that one should perform the duty of offerings to their forefathers, who live in the southern direction, implying the pitrs or departed ancestors⁷⁷. Similarly, a son saves his forefathers of his lineage by his actions. Thus, the offering of panda or rive ball is recognized as an important ritual⁷⁸.

13.3. **The Significance of Pinda:** Puram brings out the relation between body, life and growth with earth, water and food. As the human body depends on water, giving food amounts to giving life, because body is primarily based on food. Food is nothing but water in association with land. One who combines water and land into one entity is also the creator of life and body. Here, the expression used is “unavin pindam” i.e, the body is considered as part of food, as it grows with food⁷⁹. This concept can also be considered as the point of evolution of the

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concept of “Panchabhuta tatva” connecting five natural elements with the creation of five senses of human body and hence the man himself. Therefore, when a man dies, it is quite natural to think that his body should go back to the five natural elements quickly, so that he may have the next life immediately. This should be the origin of cremation in Tamilzhagam, of course with the association of fire-related rituals or yagnas. Puram also mentions about the performance of 21 yagnas. Avur Mulangizhar describes that Punjatrur Parppan Guaniyan Vinnathayan has come from a family, that has performed 21 types of Yagnas. Though, the names of 21 yagnas are not named or mentioned, they are implied as seven Soma yagnas, seven Havir yagnas and seven Baga yagnas performed as a part of last crematory rites⁸⁰.

13.4. Other types of Burials: Post-crematory burial is found, where an Urn is brought to crematory grounds and it is also supported by the archaeological evidences⁸¹. In the case of royal burials, even in the dead is a child or just a lump of flesh or diseased man or otherwise, it will be cut placing on the Kusa grass with a sword, as they always long for a glorious death on the battle fields⁸².

13.5. Ancestor Worship: It is a pre-historic practice as evidenced by the Neolithic and megalithic cultures. The practice of burying the used things by the dead along with their dead bodies or bones in urns, pits etc are followed by the ancient Tamils. Generally, a hole on the eastern side of the burial is left, just enough a man can enter with the belief that the soul may enter and leave through it. The belief in rebirth, cyclic nature of birth and death, and immortality are abundantly found in the literature⁸³. All are mentioned in one poem: Grown is declined, declined is grown; born is dead, dead is born and born is dead again; the Moon teaches this wonderful philosophy even to illiterate man to understand the mortal nature of life.

13.6. Rites, rituals and ceremonies followed and the Tamil Purification Movement: Till 19th century, there was no opposition to rites, rituals and ceremonies conducted from birth to death in Tamilnadu with prohibits. However, after the advent of the Tanitamil movement that can be mentioned as Tamil Purification Movement, Exclusivist Tamil Lobby, Only Tamil Association etc., opposition was created for the prohibit-conduct rites, rituals and ceremonies¹. The Tamil Chauvinist advocates were bewildered by the practices followed already and they have been followed faithfully by the believers. In fact, the Tamil purificatory, self-respect and related groups themselves were practicing faithfully under the guise of “sectarian practices”. They resembled Aryan practices, though,

¹ The modern revival of the Tamil Purist Movement (also known as the Pure Tamil Movement) is attributed to Maraimalai Adigal, who publicly pledged to defend pure Tamil in 1916. Advocates of purism popularised Tamil literature and crusaded for it, organising rallies in villages and towns and making Tamil purism a political issue. The logical extension of this effort was to purge Tamil of the Sanskrit influence (including its negative social perceptions, which were thought to keep the Tamils in a state of economic, cultural, and political servitude) seen as making Tamil susceptible to northern political domination. Anti-Sanskrit and anti-Hindi Tamil Nadu policies alienated the Brahmins, who were seen as supporting both languages.

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Tamil names were used. Thus, A. K. Balasubramaniam², though the marriage ritual without prohibit / Brahmin priest, he could note the similarity, when, he discussed about Pushpini Muhurtha, Maru vilakkam, Kathu kuttal, sending school etc. Even for the last rites conducted, the names may differ like Marana chadangu, ettuk kattu, ima chadangu, karumadhi, Chavukkandu, padaiyal / thithi, etc., they resemble antiyesti. Of late, when the Tamil chauvinist experts pursued their purification and expurgation processes, they ended up with sectarian interpretation of social processes. Thus, the Universities have been flooded with M.Phil, Ph.D theses on these subjects on different castes and people groups. As the research students have been interested in submitting their theses, they have restricted their study to a particular community, viz, nadir, vellalar, chettiar, and so on. As it is anathema for them to compare with Sanskrit literature, because of prevalent, Aryan-Dravidian, Sanskrit-Tamil, Brahmin-non-Brahmin divides, perhaps, they have not attempted. However, here, because of the striking similarities, the practices are compared with Samskaras.

14. A Comparison of Karanams and Samskaras: After discussing about the Karanams from birth to death, a comparison is made here with the Samskaras. The number of Samskaras varies from ten to fifty two depending upon various traditions. Earlier sources contain ten starting with Garbadhana to Vivaha⁸⁴.

1. Garbadhana (Sacrament of Impregnation).
2. Punsavana (the ceremony of procreation of vigorous child).
3. Simantinyana (the ceremony of keeping the mind of pregnant woman satisfied – parting off of her hair etc).
4. Jatakarma (ceremony of the newly born child).
5. Namakarma (ceremony of naming the child).
6. Annaprashana (ceremony of giving solid or cereal food to the child).
7. Chudakarma (tonsure and ceremony of tuft).
8. Upanayana (sacrament of thread).
9. Samavartana (returning home after studies).
10. Vivaha (sacrament of marriage).

In later lists, we find other Samskaras, particularly that of death and yagnas are added. The question as to whether a few Samskaras were increased to have elaborate rituals or many Samskaras were reduced to have definite and limited numbers is a debatable one. Generally, it is found that South Indian tradition contain elaborate ceremonies for death and cremation. Later, slowly, the North Indian tradition appears to have incorporated these into their Samskara list. Swami Dayananda Saraswati strongly refutes that certain last rites followed are not consistent with Vedic rituals⁸⁵. But, in South India, even in remote villages, after death and cremation / burial, the 13th day, 16th day ceremonies are elaborately performed irrespective of caste affiliations. The most popular list contains Sixteen Samskaras (mentioned as ‘Shodasa Samskaras’):

² A. K. Balasubramaniam, *Tamil Marriage Practices (Vaishnavism)*, Dhanalakshmi Publishers, Madras, 1948.

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|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Garbadhana. | 6. <u>Niskarma.</u> | 11. <u>Vedaambha.</u> |
| 2. Pynsavana. | 7. Annaprashna | 12. Samavartana. |
| 3. Simantonayana. | 8. Chudakarma. | 13. Vivaha. |
| 4. Jatakarma. | 9. <u>Karnavedha</u> | 14. <u>Vanaprastha.</u> |
| 5. Namakarma. | 10. Upanayana. | 15. <u>Sanyasa.</u> |
| | | 16. <u>Antyasti.</u> |

The added six are shown underlined.

It can be seen that the underlined Samskaras are added ones to the earlier list. Then, another popular grouping id Forty Samskaras, as listed below⁸⁶:

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|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Garbadhana. | <u>Pancha Yagnas</u> | <u>Havir Yagnas.</u> |
| 2. Punsavana. | 15. Brahma. | 27. Agni adhana. |
| 3. Simantonayana. | 16. Deva. | 28. Agnihotra. |
| 4. Jatakarma. | 17. Pitru. | 29. Darsapurnamsa. |
| 5. Namakarma. | 18. Bhuta. | 30. Agrahyana. |
| 6. Annaprashna | 19. Manushya. | 31. Caturmasya. |
| 7. Sausam. | | 32. Nirudapasuband |
| 8. Upanayana. | | 33. Sautramani. |
| <u>Vedavratras</u> | <u>Paka Yagnas</u> | <u>Soma Yagnas.</u> |
| 9. Prajapatya. | 20. Pitru | 34. Agnistoma. |
| 10. Saumya. | sraddham. | 35. Adhyaknistoma. |
| 11. Aneya. | 21. Pavana. | 36. Ukdhya. |
| 12. Vaisvedeva. | 22. Astaka. | 37. Shodasi. |
| 13. Samavartana. | 23. Sravana. | 38. Vajpeya. |
| 14. Vivaha. | 24. Asveyuji. | 39. Atirata. |
| | 25. Agrahayani. | 40. Aptoryama. |
| | 26. Caitra. | |

Thus, when we go through the lengthy list, it is evident that more importance is given to yagnas and connected rituals. Then, slowly importance is shifted to child birth and marriage at one end, and last rites at another end. Therefore, the Samskaras involving yagnas must have been the ancient ones than others, though all incorporate Vedic hymns for procedural methods, if we consider that Vedic rituals are Yagna-oriented. Then, the Samskaras involving child birth and marriage must have been ancient ones than others, if we consider that they are not yagna-oriented. Therefore, the sudden importance given to the elaborate last rites and their inclusion in the Samskaras list shows some influence occurred during that period.

14.2. The important point to be noted is that most of the writers on last rites in Sanskrit are from South India and the works are very much later dated than the Sangam literature. There are some practices, which were followed by the ancient Tamils are conspicuously found in the rituals of Brahmins. They are Kaimmai nonbu, Tali, Bride price, 21 yagnas and Nadukal.

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Kaimmai: There are many verses which clearly mention about the status of widows, who do not want to commit sati, but live with the following restrictions: shaving off hair, removal of bangles and other ornaments including Tali, eating tasteless food, bathing in cold water and sleeping on the floor.

Tali: Much importance is given to the Tali, which is the symbol of married life. There are many sects in south and mostly in North India, who do not wear any Tali, even after marriage. But, a Brahmin women, like any other Tamil women cannot think about the loss of Tali under any circumstance.

Bride price: The practice of giving bride-price for marrying off a woman is found symbolically in offering Tali and saree to her. Stridhana meaning woman's property is sometimes unique in the sphere of inheritance, where woman alone has absolute and exclusive right to its possession, enjoyment, disposal and transfer.

21 Yagnas: As has been pointed out, the 21 yagnas are added with the 16 Samskaras with modification, popular South Indian 40 Samskaras have been evolved. The mention of 21 yagnas in Purananuru, just as in the Gautama Sutras is significant⁸⁷.

Nadukal: For the preparation of Nadukal, six steps have been prescribed: 1. Selection of stone, 2. Chiselling, 3. Immersion in water (for cleaning), 4. Erection (at a place), 5. Engraving and 6. Paying homage (with offerings) ⁸⁸. Surprisingly, very similar rites are followed by Brahmins even today on 10th day for the dead. The ceremony contains the following steps:

1. Selection stone,
2. Cleaning with water, milk etc.,
3. Seating on darpa (Kusa) grass and writing the name of death on it with the grass symbolically,
4. Pashana Sthapanam (stone fixing, one at the house and another on the banks of river or where rituals are conducted)
5. Invoking spirit to enter and
6. Offerings with Vastodharana (offering of dress) etc.

14.2. These examples clearly prove that Brahmins or such type of people of the ancient Tamizhagam must have contributed to the development of Samskaras pertaining to Last rites connected with cremation and the 21 yagnas. Or the Brahmins, who consciously follow these practices must have links with the ancient Tamizhagam and continue to practice such rites without break at least in some cases, in spite of the onslaught of modernism, atheism and anti-brahminism. Therefore, it is worthwhile to appreciate such existing cultural links in historical perspective and interpret the past. The evolution of fire worship must have influenced the practices of Karanams / Samskaras to incorporate the element of fire in the rituals leading to yagna oriented Samskaras. Now, in all Samskaras, fire and Vedic hymns are used. Therefore, when exactly fire was

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started to be used by the ancient Tamils may be another interesting study to be taken up.

Conclusion: In view of the above discussion, the following points are inferred as conclusion:

1. A critical study of the ancient Tamil literature, known as “Sangam” literature dated to c.500/300 BCE to 100 CE reveal that the people of the period of the area, where they lived had shared social, cultural, liturgical and religious practices exhibited through their rites, rituals and ceremonies.
2. The poets consciously recorded the social processes taking place from birth to death of the ancient Tamils in their poetry.
3. Though, there were no codified practices or rituals available in the form of book, it is evident that they were practiced.
4. They, in fact, resemble the standardized rituals, known as karanams, sacraments and Samskaras.
5. Such similarities cannot be incidental or accidental, unless, the involved people had accepted willingly and followed on the occasions faithfully.
6. Certain practices like Nadukal (of course other rituals also) prove the striking similarity between the so-called Tamil and non-Tamil or Vedic and non-Vedic people.
7. Therefore, the “Aryanization” of Tamils could not have taken place, when they were already having such similar practices.
8. That they could have been “Aryanized” before such period cannot be taken seriously for historical discussion, as the archaeological evidences could go back to megalithic period dated to c.1000 BCE.
9. The linguistic interpretation of “language speaking people” migrating without any external compulsions or invasions also has been accompanied with such migration of megalithic people from outside the ancient Indian territories, as proposed by the scholars.
10. Under such circumstances, during the material period, people of the ancient India had common rites, rituals and ceremonies, as exhibited and discussed above.

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Notes and References

1. “After the appearance of falsehood and immorality, Iyer introduced the Karanam (sacrament)” – Tol. Porul. Karpiyal – 143.

2. The meaning of Karanam are:

- ⇒ Manam = mind; the other meaning is ‘marriage’.
- ⇒ Buddhi = intellect / reason.
- ⇒ Siddhi = firmness / success.
- ⇒ Shankaram = self-will.
- ⇒ Bavam = state of being.

In short, it has similar meaning to “Sanskar”.

The other philosophical meanings are developed later with the development of Saiva Siddhanta.

3. Paripadal – 9: 14-16; Tol. Porul. Kalaviyal – 90; Tol. Porul. Karpiyal – 140;

4. Paditruppattu – 74: 17-21.

5. Ingurunuru – 251: 1-2.

6. Kadunchuzh ciruvan – Ing. 309:3.
Kadunchuzh magal – Ing. 386:4.

7. Ing.90:4; 405:4; 409:2; 442:5.
Agananuru – 6:13; 16:19; Kuruntogai – 8:6, 359:6.

8. Ing 403; Kalittoai – 75:23-25; 81:35..

9. Padi – 9:13-16.

10. Agananuru – 66:1-4.

11. Puram. 100:11.

12. Puram.82.

13. Kali. 29:1-4.

14. Puram.20:14.

15. Kuru.287:3-8.

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16. Maduraikanchi. – lines 603-610.
17. Kali.110:14.
18. Puram.28:1-7.
19. Puram.312:1, Agam.35:1.
20. Puram.113:8-9.
21. Madu. Lines 609-615.
22. Ing.65:3-4.
23. Madu. Line.602; Natrinai. 380:1-6.
24. Nat.40:6-8; 370:1-5; 380:1-5.
25. Mad.line.615.
26. Nat.40:7-8.
27. Malaipadukadam. Line.253.
28. Ing.403; Kali.75:23-25; 81:35.
29. Kali.80:18-19; Puram. 160:22.
30. Kali.81:7; 82:2-3; 83:5-6; 84:2-5. Puram.160:19; 164:3-4; Natrinai.355:2; Ing.128.
31. Puram.77.
32. Kali. 77 to 80.
33. Pulippaaltali – Agam.54:18, 7:17; Kuru.161:3; Cereal food – Nat.77:7-8; Agam.219:5-8 etc.
34. Pari.11:95-96; Pari.tirattu.10:1; Padi.86:11; Nat.16:9, 286:1-2.
35. N. Subramaniam, ***Sangam Polity***, Ennes Publications, Madurai, 1980.
36. Padi.74:17-21.
37. Puram.312:2.
38. Puram.183.

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39. Puram.183.

40. Puram.183; Tol.Porul.Agattinaiyiyal – 31, 33.

41. Tol.Porul.Agat. – 27,28.

42. Tanniradal: Kali.59:10-13; Pari.11:90-91, 11:134-139; Nat.22:6-7, 80:7; Kuru.196:4; Ing.84:4; Puram.70:6.

43. Puram.337l Nat.351:2.

44. Kollerukodal; Kali.99 to 105.

45. Puram.3365 to 340.

46. Bride price: Nat.300:5; puram.344, 366, 354; Ing. 253, 276, 147; Mullaikkali.3:71.

47. Puram.344, 336-343.

48. Puram.336,341.

49. Tol.Porul.Meipattiyal – 269.

50. Agam.86, 136.

51. Nat.300:10; Ing.253, 276, 147; Mullaikkali.3:71; Puram.344:3-4;

52. Agam.86,136.

53. Ing.399, 371-380.

54. Ing.379.

55. Agam.86, 136.

56. Padi.5:15; Puram.127, 261, 78:8-12; 224;15-17.

57. Agam.369:2, 385:11; Kurinchipattu lines 231-232.

57a. Ing.391 to 400.

58. Ing.394, 399.

59. Ing.394; Agam.397.

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60. Kurunchikkali.26.

61. Kali.93:6-7; Puram.246:10-12; Puram.206.

62. Palaikkali.17.

63. Puram.191.

64. Puram.192.

65. Puram.194.

66. Puram.195.

67. Puram.239:20-21.

68. Puram.291, 359.

69. Agam.289:1-4; Puram.3:21-22, 264.

70. Puram.231:1-3, 238:1-5; 246:11-12, 356,259, 363 (crematory grounds).

71. Puram.238:1-5; 228:12, 266:5, 364:13; Nat.27:11-12; Padi.44:22-33.

72. Agam.289:1-4; Puram.3:21-22, 264.

Archaeologists divide them into –

11.	Cain circle	15.	Rockcut
12.	Dolmenoid	cave.	
cist.		16.	Menhir.
13.	Umbrella	17.	Hero stones.
stone		18.	Urn.
14.	Topikkal.		

73. Puram. 221, 260, 263, 264, 265, 329, 335.

Agam.35, 53, 67, 131, 179, 269, 289, 297, 298, 365.

Malaipadukadam lines 387-389; Ing. 352 (references about Nadukal).

74. Puram.260:22-28, 263:7-8, 265:1.

75. Puram.260:1-4.

76. As in.73, all references about nadukal;

God – Puram. 335:11-12, 265:4-5, 329:1-4; Agam.35:8-11.

77. Puram.6:4-5, 58:4-5.

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78. Puram.234:2-6, 249:12-14, 360:17-20, 363:10-14.

79. Puram.18:19-23, 186:1-4.

80. Puram.166:8.

81. Puram.238:1-5.

S. P. Gupta, ***Disposal of the Dead and Physical Types in Ancient India***, Oriental Publishers, New Delhi, 1972, p.217.

82. Puram.74:1-2, 93:7-11.

83. Puram.134:1-4, 214:6-13, 236:10-12, 245:4-7, 256, 356 to 363, 27:11-14, 31:2, 188; Nat.397:7-9.

84. Manu. II-26.

85. Swami Dayananda Saraswati, ***The Samskara Vidhi***, Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, New Delhi, 1976, pp.342-43.

86. Gautama Dharma Sutra.VIII: 13-19.

87. According to modern estimates, the Sutra period falls within 4th to 6th centuries BCE and Sangam period 300- BCE to 300 CE. Those who emphasize about the influence of Sanskrit literature on Tamil literature should take important fact that most of such Sanskrit writers were from south. Particularly, Boudhayana Apastamba, whose Sraddha rituals are popular, are from south. He lived in Andhra area in those days. There are many references about the performance of yagnas and other performers in the Sangam literature. Parpar, Anthanar, Arutozhilalar, Aravor, Marayavar, Muppirinulor, Irupirappalar, Vedhiyar and other expressions are used to denote the persons connected with the rituals of Yagnas, Vedas and other fire-connected ceremonies.

88. Tol.Purattinaiyal.Sutra.60.

Similar steps are found in the Sangam literature as explained.